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To identify the educational problems of Puerto Rican youth in the United States, Aspira Inc. sponsored a 2-day conference for educators and leaders of Puerto Rican and Spanish-speaking communities in 37 cities in 19 states. A commissioned study, The Losers" (UD 007622), served as a stimulus for discussion by the participants. The conference proceedings have been disseminated (UD 007623) and a followup questionnaire has been sent to the participants to determine the success of the conference and to learn what specific action has been taken in various communities to improve the education of Puerto Rican youth. (EF)

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FINAL REPORT

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE: MEETING THE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF URBAN PUERTO RICAN YOUTH

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The conference was unique in bringing together diverse groups and people whose functions had a common interface: The educational needs of Urban Puerto Rican youth. It was even more distinctive in being the product of the planning, organizing and funding efforts of several diverse groups and individuals who allowed Aspira to serve as overall sponsor. The Carnegie Corporation, the New York State Department of Education, and the U.S. Offices of Education all gave not only financial support but also wisdom, direction and planning assistance. Countless others from community groups, local schools, and public and private organizations helped in many ways. To begin to cite names and groups would involve compiling a lengthy roster

Special gratitude must be expressed to the very able conference coordinator, Mrs. Marjorie Pleshette. The Aspira staff, professional and clerical, worked very hard and did excellent work in all phases of the conference.

Finally, we acknowledge the good will, commitment and integrity of the many confreres who carried home not only ideas and suggestions, but also the determination that specific action steps be taken to meet the needs of Puerto Rican youth. The words were wise and important but their value is measured ultimately by deeds that change lives for the better.

SUMMARY

The available evidence, scant and incomplete though it may be, indicates that Urban Puerto Rican youth have distinctive educational problems of great severity. The Coleman report and other such studies contain data supporting such a conclusion, but do not present these problems fully or in context. The lack of comment on these problems further implies that educational officials may be unaware of the unmet needs of Urban Puerto Rican youth.

The initial step in outlining the dimensions of these needs was to convene a two day national conference of leaders of Puerto Rican and other Spanish speaking communities and educational leaders, representing 37 cities in 19 states. A commissioned study by an educational report served as the stimulus for additional discussions by invited panelists and participants. The proceedings of the conference have been published and disseminated. A follow-up study of conference participants centered around both their evaluation of the conference, its objectives and achievements and the specific action steps that have been inaugurated in their respective communities to better meet the educational needs of Urban Puerto Rican youth.

PROBLEMS UNDER CONSIDERATION

Problem and Objectives

Sizeable numbers of Puerto Rican youth live in the cities of Chicago, Illinois; Gary, Indiana; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Newark, New Jersey; Hartford, Connecticut; Rochester, New York; Boston Massachusetts, and other major urban centers. (1) The documented presence of these groups has, however, been consistently overshadowed by the massive size of the Puerto Rican community in New York City where some 225,000 Puerto Rican youth comprise approximately 20% of the school population (2). These youth have many distinctive features in common.

Urban Puerto Rican youngsters have been identified in an increasing number of studies as ranking lowest on a variety of educational achievement scales (3). Most remedial or compensatory programs for disadvantaged youth do not relate to the special needs of Puerto Ricans whose socio-economic status, cultural heritage, language difference, migratory patterns, and community attitudes all tend to alienate them from the mainstream of American society.

Until the educational establishment recognizes the special needs of Puerto Rican students, the problem will not be solved. Thus, the first essential step is awareness that the problem does, indeed, exist.

Since 1961, ASPIRA, an independent Puerto Rican leadership development agency, has been working primarily with high school students and their parents. Its experience in helping students cope with cultural and language barriers, low self-esteem, and a general lack of knowledgeaabout opportunities for post-secondary education has been highly successful. It has developed a number of specific techniques for working with students and their parents which are now known to work. And in the course of its efforts, it has uncovered those areas where the school systems are not coping adequately with these students.

The educational system can't do the job by itself. By calling a national conference of administrators, educators, and community leaders, ASPIRA expected to generate a new impetus toward meeting the special eduational needs of Puerto Rican youth. Initial steps involve exploration of the problem and communication between interested persons.

1. OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of the ASPIRA Conference will be to develop:

Recognition of the specific needs, strengths, problems and prospects of Puerto Ricans in the United States. These include patterns and effects of migration, education, history bilingulism, socio-economic pressures, and community attitude.

Understanding of causes and effects of the current situation, in the schools, in the Puerto Rican community, and in the total urban framework.

Action purposes and programs toward upgrading the educational situation of Puerto Ricans in the continental United States.

There are two underlying premises:

First, that while vast and well-funded programs are being launched by both federal and private sources to meet the educational needs of minority groups, the special nature of the situation of the Puerto Ricans has not been recognized. These programs recognize that local school boards and groups are not able to handle either the fiscal or social dimensions of minority group education. The Puerto Rican has distinctive aspects to his problem- bilingualism, the migration from Puerto Rico and its culture, the reverse migration and, most important, the fact that they are at the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder. (According to the 1960 census, and additional more current data, Puerto Ricans, as a group, have higher unemployment, lower median income, less education, and poorer jobs than any other group including Negroes in the communities they reside in) (4)

Second, the Puerto Rican community knows its own needs and special problems, is capable of identifying and defining the issues of concern, and has the determination and experience to contribute to a constructive response to the problem, as overwhelming as it may appear. Programs and solutions devised and imposed from without are ineffective and have consistently prove to be irrelevant. The ASPIRA philosophy, developed through the past decade, is that Puerto Ricans must take primary leadership in solving their problems and stimulating positive change.

While more is known statistically of the Puerto Ricans in New York City than anywhere else, it is a fact that, even here, too little is known to develop systematic programs which accurately reflect current needs. For example, until 1964, there simply were no figures available as to the number of Puerto Ricans graduating high school with academic diplomas. A special study made in 1963 revealed that approximately 300 academic diplomas were awarded Puerto Ricans that June out of a total of 20,000 awarded to students in the high schools of New York City. (Puerto Rican students were 7.2% of the academic enrollment).. It is apparent that today, despite the fact that over

225,000 Puerto Ricans are enrolled in the city's school system, the proportion headed for post-secondary education has not changed significantly. But, no one seems to really know just how bad the picture is. To our knowledge, this factual picture is even dimmer in other major cities. Today, the Puerto Rican youngster represents the invisible student. Yet, it is obvious, to those who devote attention, that in the cities, his desperate educational needs demand urgent attention and immediate action.

METHODS

A. The Conference Concept

The conference was chosen as the means of accomplishing the designated objective because it represented a way of sharing information and opinion in a context where challenge was possible. The opportunity for responsible confrontation between Puerto Rican community leaders and educational officials was seen as highly desirable.

B. The Commissioned Report

To ensure that the discussion would proceed on an informed basis, The Commissioned Study by an educational writer was distributed prior to the conference to all speakers and panelists. All conferers received the study entitled "The Losers" at the start of the conference.

The study, which is attached to this report, not only sets fourth additional factial material, but also represents an objective appraisal of the educational situation of Puerto Rican youth by an experienced observer. Nevertheless, the study does not claim to be "balanced" any more than we can describe the facts in the Coleman report as balanced.

C. Dissemenation of the Published Proceedings

The proceedings of the conference describe not only the problems, as they manifest themselves in the various settings, but also specific suggestions for remedial activity. They were distributed to all conference participants and to a lot of others who make decisions concerning educational opportunities of urban Puerto Rican youth. Discussions are in progress concerning possible wider publication and dissemenation of these proceedings.

D. Follow up Questionnaire

Together with the published proceedings, a questionnaire on the conference was sent to all participants (enclosed as Appendix B). By combining the two distributions, it was hoped to get an adequate response to the questionnaire. Thus far, responses have been received from 73 conferers with an additional 26 (primarily local) conferers having responded orally. This represents a 31% rate of response from the 321 conferers who were included in the mailing.

FINDINGS

The essential findings of the conference are contained in its records, in the comments and exchanges, but most of all in the prepared papers. Little of the information and observation reported therein had been published or disseminated previously. These findings therefore, represent concrete information and informed opionion on aspects of the educational situation of Urban Puerto Rican youth.

Our definition of a conference is not limited to its function as a platform for the dissemination of knowledge of the examination of data. Intrinsic to the conference is its role as an instrument of change. We therefore, include among the findings the follow-up information returned to us both by personal communication and by evaluation questionaire from the participants on specific action steps taken or attempted subsequent to the conference. It is clear that a conference alone is not the sole stimulus for change in educational policy or practice. Our confreres reported that the conference was one of several factors that both stimulated them to suggest changes and lent support to their identification of needs and potential methods and techniques.

Questionnaire Responses

The questionnaire form was chosen in preference to a rating form so that responses would be open-ended. Respondents did, in fact, tend to elaborate their responses in several well chosen sentences. The identification of the role of the respondent at the conference helped to get the replies into a perceptual context.

There were three overlapping perceptions of the purpose of the conference:

1. To disseminate and share information on the educational needs of urban Puerto Rican youth.

2. To provide for confrontation between the Puerto Rican community and educational leaders.

3. To stimulate action and protest from the respective groups.

Most respondents identified particular speeches or presentations as the most beneficial part of the conference for them, although several young Puerto Ricans identified the presence and representation of young Puerto Ricans as the most beneficial. Identified as least beneficial were "back biting and expressions of anger against established organizations" and "griping about long standing ills". Those expressing this view were, in every case, representatives of major educational institutions or organizations.

There was general agreement that although the facilities were fairly good, the cramped conditions under which the panel sessions were conducted detracted appreciably from their value for most participants.

The overall reaction to the conference was not only highly positive, but genuinely enthusiastic.

Most significant were the responses to the question about specific action steps emanating from the conference. For one thing, half of the respondents added a comment that the conference must be followed up with many action steps by its organizers.

For another, nearly thirty respondents quite frankly admitted that they had not one single action step to report, either conference inspired or deriving from any other inspiration.

The programs and steps that were taken, as reported by some participants, included exploration of bilingual education programs, parent education programs and in a few cases, the creation of several new admissions and scholarship opportunities especially for Puerto Rican youth in the various cities.

We would also report that a specific outcome of this conference is greater articulation among the Puerto Rican communities in several cities which has made possible several planning activities aimed toward the establishment of Puerto Rican educational agencies in cities other than New York. This activity is currently on the proposal stage, and funds are being actively sought in the respective communities.

APPENDIX A

Audience Participants — **Total 321**

37 Cities in 19 States — 88

I. Educational Administrators
Elementary & Secondary

a.	City	63
b.	State	8
c.	Federal	6
d.	Private & Parochial	8

II. Higher Education Officials includes: Federal, State, Local, Private Colleges, Deans of Education, College Entrance Board Executives, Centers for Urban Education. — 51

III. Community Representation
e.g., U.P.A., United Bronx Parents, P.R. Forum, Youth Development Organizations
Active P.R. in Educational Fields — 62

IV. Business - Civil, Social Welfare
Political Groups, Labor Leaders
e.g., P.E.A., U.F.T., Church Officials, Editors & Publishers- — 23

V. Students - Aspirantes, etc. — 10

SAMPLE FOLLOW UP QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX B

ASPIRA, INC.
296 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10001
244-1110

In order to help us plan further activities related to our objectives, we need your cooperation in reacting to our conference. Would you be kind enough to fill in this questionnaire and return it to us at your earliest convenience.

1. What was your role at the Conference?

2. What did you see as the obejectives of the Conference?

3. What was the most beneficial part of the Conference for you?

4. What was the least beneficial part of the Conference for you?

5. If future conferences were to be held, what improvements or changes would you suggest?

6. What further recommendations for action do you suggest (in addition to those arrived at during the Conference)?

7. In your community, in your setting, what action steps are being planned or being taken to improve the educational situation of urban Puerto Rican youth?

8. What is your overall reaction to the Conference and its theme?

(Feel free to extend answers to the other side).